



CHANCELLOR'S NOTES

Chancellor Rhee's regular newsletter on learning, schools and system-wide reforms in DC Public Schools

April 6, 2010

For the Love of Words - DC Fourth Graders Lead the Nation in Reading Growth



Last week, the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) released the “Nation’s Report Card” on reading. The District was one **of only three jurisdictions in which fourth grade scores rose during the period from 2007 to 2009**, and **no state had a greater increase** during that two-year period.

More DC students performed at or above "basic" levels than at any time since the NAEP was first administered in either grade, and across subgroups: black, female, and students both eligible and ineligible for free/reduced lunch all showed statistically significant scale score gains. At the eighth grade level, the percentage of students scoring basic or above, and the percentage scoring proficient or advanced, both increased. YES!

Congratulations to DC fourth graders who made the news as the one bright spot in the national picture of reading growth in this country.

We are so proud of the principals, teachers and students who accomplished these results. **DC fourth graders are outpacing the country in academic growth** on the nationally administered gold-standard reading test.

How do we know we're on the right track?

Recently I had lunch with students from Ross Elementary School, which showed progress in reading on our local test last year. When I asked what students' favorite books were, hands shot up around the table. They could barely sit in their seats as they described books and series they loved. Percy Jackson! Diary of a Wimpy Kid! The Mysterious Benedict Society!

Their passion for stories and reading was almost palpable, and it was clear from our conversation that their principal, teacher and parents had all inspired their excitement. Last week's news showed that progress in reading is also happening across the district. With a greater focus on literacy, teachers are more supported than before to ensure that children develop critical literacy skills they need.

How are they doing it?

Principals, teachers and students have been focusing on literacy by:

- Implementing a new two-hour literacy block at the elementary level;
- Participating in targeted professional development on the National Reading Panel's five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension;
- Assessing young children's earliest reading skills using DIBELS, a handheld technology that gives teachers instant and constant progress monitoring of students' reading skills. It enables them to immediately stop and re-teach something when students need them to, and to continue on when students have mastered a skill.
- Making full use of valuable out-of-school time. Students in suburban districts tend to continue their learning during this time, and we have added an afterschool Power Hour and Saturday Scholars in the early and middle grades to enrich this time for our students as well.



Teaching children to fall in love – with books and words!

Let's keep reading with our children. Let's fuel them with the stories that will make them fall in love with reading, and introduce them to the characters whose stories are as alive as their own. Let them jump from their seats to shout new words and explore their sounds.

As you do, you may find yourself anticipating the next volume of the Mysterious Benedict Society as much as they are. Last time I checked, my copy was in my purse.

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